

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY CALLS FOR NEW INVESTMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, Criticizes Bush Administration Efforts to Cut Funding for Education Reform

KINGSTON -- In a meeting with principals of Ulster County's elementary schools today, Hinchey called on President Bush to offer an education budget that matches his rhetoric, criticizing the Administration for under-funding the president's own "No Child Left Behind" initiative. Hinchey argued that the federal government must take on a larger share of funding for school construction, education for disabled children, and teacher training in order to improve the quality of education for every student and keep property taxes from rising dramatically.

"President Bush refers to the passage of education reform as the biggest accomplishment of his administration, but the reality is that the No Child Left Behind Act has been an empty promise," Hinchey said. "The Administration has cut funding for its own initiative by \$90 million from last year, resulting in 18,000 fewer teachers getting trained, 33,000 fewer children in after-school programs, and 300,000 bilingual students who won't improve their English proficiency. The simple truth is that a substantial number of public school children will be left behind."

Hinchey discussed the impact of the No Child Left Behind initiative, which placed new requirements on local schools to improve student performance but also promised the necessary funding to help schools raise teacher quality, reduce class sizes and implement other initiatives to help students learn. House Republicans approved the Bush Administration's request for funding that initiative at \$90 million less than last year and \$7 billion less than the education reform act promised.

"These cuts could not come at a worse time," said Hinchey. "Most states have big holes to fill in their budgets as a result of the economic downturn, leaving them less able to meet the new federal standards out of their own budgets. In New York, that translates into a \$402 million gap in elementary and secondary education funding. The bill for the No Child Left Behind initiative will fall squarely on the shoulders of local property taxpayers, the most burdensome and least equitable tax on New Yorkers."

In addition to calling on President Bush to live up to the promises of the No Child Left Behind Act, Hinchey discussed the two major shortcomings of the education reform effort: the failure to take federal responsibility for the \$127 billion backlog of school repairs and construction, and the federal government's failure since 1975 to pay its promised share of funding for children with disabilities.

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Hinchey said, "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) promised states 40 percent of the necessary funding to ensure quality education for all children with disabilities. That promise has never once been fulfilled in 27 years, with states receiving only 16.5 percent of IDEA funding from the federal government. President Bush and House Republicans last year soundly rejected a bipartisan Senate proposal that would have increased federal funding to 40 percent by 2007.

"Without federal investment, the school modernization crisis is only getting worse. In my district, some of school buildings are 100 years old, and the majority of school buildings are more than 50 years old. These facilities are not capable of meeting today's education needs and accommodating today's student populations. I have offered legislation since 1996 that would provide federal funding to meet these critical needs, but President Bush and Congressional Republicans have continued to block this proposal. As we've seen in school budget votes across the Hudson Valley, property taxpayers are unable to finance necessary infrastructure improvements on their own."